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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 704th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Friday, 25 May 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DOEK

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STATEMENT BY THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

1. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed Ms. Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

2. Ms. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) greeted the four new members of the Committee (Ms. Al-Thani, Ms. Chutikul, Mr. Al-Sheddi and Mr. Citarella). She congratulated Ms. Sardenberg on her re-election and Mr. Doek on his election to the chair of the Committee.

3. The Committee had a particularly heavy workload for its twenty-seventh session since, in addition to considering the reports of eight States parties, it had to address the issues of future general comments, arrangement of a day of general discussion on violence against children and the establishment of future guidelines for reporting under the optional protocols to the Convention. Then, from 11 to 15 June 2001, it would be participating in the 3rd meeting of the preparatory committee for the General Assembly's special session on children, to be held in September 2001.

4. The Commission on Human Rights, in its resolution 2001/75, had noted with interest the Committee's adoption of a general comment on the aims of education and had noted with appreciation its initiative on State violence against children. It had also welcomed the intention to organize a general discussion, in September 2001, on violence against children in schools and in the family, and had welcomed the Committee's recommendation to request the Secretary-General to conduct an in-depth study on the issue of violence against children. The Commission had also renewed, for a three-year period, the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and had noted with satisfaction the report it had requested on the abduction of children from northern Uganda (resolution 2001/74). Among other provisions likewise aimed at promoting the rights of the child, the Commission had decided to appoint a special rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people (resolution 2001/57), who would doubtless interact with the Committee, since the Convention was the first legally binding instrument to recognize the rights of indigenous children; it had also adopted a resolution on access to medication in the context of pandemics such as HIV/AIDS (resolution 2001/33). In addition, her Office and UNICEF had organized, during the Commission's session, a panel on racism, children and the role of education, in which Mr. Doek had played an active part.

5. The Committee had also played a welcome part in the preparations for the World Conference against Racism in the form of a general comment on article 29 (a) as well as a contribution to the issue devoted to children of the Conference secretariat newsletter "Durban 2001: United against racism". The Conference would devote special attention to children, who were all too often targets of racism, discrimination and exclusion, and to the need to assert their rights. The Youth Summit, to be held in August 2001, just before the opening of the forum of non-governmental organizations and the Conference, would provide an opportunity for youth to have a direct say.

6. The process of ratifying the Convention's optional protocols had slowed down; the Committee and her Office should jointly consider ways to reverse that trend. The amendment relating to article 43, paragraph 2 of the Convention had been signed by only 98 States parties, whereas 120 ratifications were required if the composition of the Committee was to be expanded so that it could deal with its heavy workload more effectively.

7. The Committee would be represented at the annual meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies, to be held at Geneva from 18 to 22 June 2001, during which recommendations and proposals should be put forward relating to the functioning and enhanced effectiveness of the various mechanisms to protect and promote human rights. In that regard, the secretariat had prepared a report on the measures it would take to support action by the various bodies involved, including the preparation of meetings and events in which the Committee was to participate in 2001.

8. Ms. SARDENBERG congratulated Ms. Robinson on having agreed to remain one year in the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights. As the Committee was particularly aware, the year 2001 would be marked by important events to which it had the task of making a substantial contribution. As well as preparing documents for the General Assembly's special session and the World Conference against Racism, it was striving to establish an overall strategy to promote one of the Convention's essential elements, namely, to raise awareness of the specific rights of children, which should be recognized as such. There was not enough awareness of the concept of children's rights, attention often being focused on childcare and the need to meet children's basic needs. The Committee had also begun to look into ways to play a more forward role in preparations for the General Assembly's special session, rather than confining its contribution to a mere communication. In addition, having noted with surprise that children were not mentioned at all in the document relating to the next meeting on human settlements, it intended to issue a statement on the subject.

9. With regard to ratification of the optional protocols, the Committee was considering the possibility of organizing, at a later session, a special meeting in order to make its aims and opinions better known. It felt that such a meeting would be the more interesting in that opportunities for dialogue with States parties were very rare, one reason being the Committee's heavy programme of work. The Committee would also appreciate knowing more about the organizing of the Youth Summit, including the place expressly reserved for children in that event.

10. Ms. EL GUINDI said that Ms. Robinson's visit to the Middle East had made a great impact in the region, and asked her to let the Committee have her impressions of the mission.

11. Mr. CITARELLA congratulated the High Commissioner on having decided to remain in office for a further year. He noted with regret that, between the first and second versions of the draft resolution of the General Assembly's special session, the place accorded to the Convention and its protocols had been considerably diminished, the Committee's role being given inadequate attention. It was essential to highlight the importance of the Convention, one of the most important human rights instruments for the many States Members of the United Nations that had chosen to ratify it.

12. Ms. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that 2001 was a pivotal year for promotion of the rights of the person in general and of the child in particular. It was essential to ensure that the Convention's importance and the Committee's role, as well as the very idea of the rights of the child, were properly recognized and highlighted, especially during the General Assembly's special session. For her part, she was ready to receive any suggestions concerning the strategy to be adopted for that purpose. She also approved the Committee's decision to issue a statement about the place of children in matters relating to human settlements, and was in favour of holding a meeting with States parties to consider, inter alia, the process of ratifying the optional protocols.

13. With regard to her Middle East mission, she had continued, since her return, to follow developments of the situation in the occupied territories very closely. What had struck her particularly was the large number of children and young persons on both sides - but above all among Palestinians - injured or killed during the clashes. She recalled that, during her visit, many young people had come to talk to her, showing how greatly concerned they were to have their voice heard and displaying considerable maturity beyond their age. It was to be hoped that, following publication of Senator Mitchell's report, a genuine dialogue at the political level could be established in the region.

14. With regard to the Youth Summit, the secretariat planned to organize, in cooperation with UNICEF, a parallel event devoted more particularly to children. Both meetings would be linked to the holding of the Durban Conference and would be an opportunity to make young people aware of the need for them to pave the way for a campaign for tolerance and understanding and against racial discrimination.

15. With regard to the resolution to be adopted at the end of the General Assembly's special session, the important thing for the moment was to agree on a text pursuant to which Governments and all actors in civil society would undertake to implement a programme of specific action. A working group made up of 21 members representing the five regional groups had been established to draw up the final version of a draft plan of action and draft declaration. She strongly urged the Committee to follow its activities, in order that the General Assembly, at its special session, could adopt a text that was clear, specific and forward-looking.

16. Lastly, she assured the members of the Committee that she was continuing to follow their work closely, carefully reading the summary records of the meetings concerning consideration of the reports of States parties, the issuing of general comments and, in particular, the preparations for the discussion on violence against children in schools and in the family, hoping that it would be on as high a plane as the one held in 2000 on State violence.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.